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Clarence Decides

—BY—

BEULAH KING



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Clarence Decides

A FARCE IN THREE ACTS

By BEULAH KING

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PUBLISHED BY
ELDRIDGE ENTERTAINMENT HOUSE,
Franklin, Ohio **Denver, Colo.**

B 3521
.I 513 C6
1920

CAST OF CHARACTERS

†

Mrs. Davenport (Aunt Susan)

Mary Ann Lee	}	her nieces
Sarah Maud Lee		
Julia May Lee		

John Smith—first gardener at Fleurmont

John Smith—second gardener at Fleurmont

John Smith—third gardener at Fleurmont

Clarence Moore

Mrs. Dixby-Moore—his mother

Lizette—maid

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Clarence Decides

ACT I.

Scene:—The living room at Fleurmont, summer home of Mrs. Davenport. At the back center a French door leading into the garden which is plainly visible. To the left and right of the door large windows hung with cretonne curtains. Beneath the windows broad window seats cushioned and pillowed. In the center of the right (stage right) wall a single door leading into the dining room. To the right of it, down stage, a fireplace with brass complements. Before the fireplace a luxurious davenport to the back of which is a long reading table with a low lamp. In the left wall and directly opposite the fireplace a single door leading into the hall. There is a cottage piano back stage left with a long seat before it. Plain chairs complete the furnishings. The appearance of the room is not elegant but of excellent taste. A brown paper parcel on the window seat. Flowers in abundance about the room.

At the rise of the curtain, Mrs. Davenport is seated in the chair by the table, holding in her hand a photograph of her three nieces taken en groupe when children. She is a small, charming woman of forty-two, with the manner of one who has seen much of life and enjoyed it. Lizette, armed with a large oilcloth duster, is polishing the piano carefully. A moment of silence while Mrs. Davenport regards the picture. Suddenly she breaks into a ripple of laughter and Lizette regards her with adoring eyes.

Mrs. D.—(to herself.) Mary Ann—Sarah Maud—Julia May. Lizette, I don't even know what they look like and they are due in less than an hour.

Lizette—Like a story book, madam. As for me, I am thrilled.

Mrs. D.—(thoughtfully) They ought to be pretty.

Lizette—How could they help it, being nieces of madam?

Mrs. D.—Lizette, do you think I am foolish?

Lizette—Foolish? Madam?

Mrs. D.—To take upon myself the getting of husbands for these three nieces.

Lizette—Madam is never foolish. (Slyly.) And, besides, madam is sure of one husband, is it not so?

Mrs. D.—Yes, Clarence has promised. Poor, dear Clarence. I shouldn't have had the courage to send for all three nieces if I hadn't been sure of one husband.

Lizette—Ah, monsieur Clarence is so eel-egant, so refined, so pr-itty!

Mrs. D.—Come here and look at this picture. (*Lizette goes to her.*) My nieces, aged three, five and seven, respectively. Do you think they will make charming young ladies?

Lizette—(clapping her hands) Ah, Madam, they are charming young ladies.

Mrs. D.—(with enthusiasm) Lizette, we must make them so. Monsieur Clarence is very fastidious and his mother, ah, Lizette, you don't know his mother. Mrs. Dixby-Moore is quite elegant. They must be trained in such a way that they will set off Monsieur's millions. It's going to take a lot of money, Lizette, before they will suit Mrs. Dixby-Moore, and we'll have to scrimp and save and pinch—but not while she's staying with us, Lizette, no, no, no, no, that would never do. We must spend all if need be, and then when Clarence decides—ah, then (*Rising with a flourish*) we are fixed, n'est ce pas?

Lizette—(going back to piano) But, madam thinks not of herself, and monsieur can wed only one.

Mrs. D.—(walking to piano) To be sure. But one is quite enough, Lizette, one is quite enough. I shall

spend whole months visiting her and she won't know I'm there, the establishment will be so large—and you will go with me, Lizette. We shall have all the roses we want, hot house in the winter and gardens in the summer. Oh, I've fine schemes in my head when Clarence decides.

Lizette—(chuckling) And he has promised.

Mrs. D.—Solemnly, Lizette, under oath! (She walks over to window at left.)

Lizette—Oh, it is a dream, but still, one must be careful.

Mrs. D.—I wish we had a grand place here, a wonderful estate. Lizette, don't breathe it to a soul, but I have advertised for three gardeners to fix over the grounds.

Lizette—Oh, mon Dieu! Th-th-three gardeners! It is an outrage. Think of the expense.

Mrs. D.—Hush! Didn't I say I must impress Mrs. Dixby Moore? Our rose trees do need attention. I've suffered worrying about them—the dear things.

Lizette—But your nieces, will they not need much money, too?

Mrs. D.—Oh, yes, a great deal; but for no longer than the summer, for Clarence will have decided by then. They must have teachers. Poor little country girls (coming down to table). But it is all worth while, Lizette. I couldn't think of having them marry rustic clowns and farmers. Never, never! And after they have married, they will take care of their poor old aunt who spent her last cent to get them husbands.

Lizette—Madam is—what do you say—a sport.

Mrs. D.—(laughing) We've a great task before us, but we'll carry it through. Did the voilles I ordered come?

Lizette—(going to the window seat at right and picking up a package) Yes, madam. *(Hands it to Mrs. D.)*

Mrs. D.—(*unwrapping it*)—I hope they won't be disappointing. I've wonderful plans for those girls' dresses. (*Bell rings.*) Mercy! Who can that be?

(*Lizette goes off at left. Mrs. D. shakes out the voilles which are lovely in design and color, and admires them while humming softly to herself. Lizette returns.*)

Lizette—(*in offended tone*) The three gardeners, madam.

Mrs. D.—Oh, yes. (*smiling*) Show them in Lizette.

(*Lizette goes off at left and Mrs. D. hastily wraps up the voilles. Lizette returns immediately, followed by three tall, fine looking young men, dressed in corduroys. The third is apparently not more than twenty-one, plump and very boyish.*)

Lizette—(*introducing them with exaggerated politeness.*) Mr. John Smith. (*First bows.*) Mr. John Smith. (*Second bows.*) Mr. John Smith. (*Third bows.*) (*Lizette goes to door at left and stands there.*)

Mrs. D.—My dear boys, what an unfortunate coincidence! Three John Smiths at one house, and all of them tending roses. (*The three glower at each other.*) However, I sha'n't let that disqualify you. I am sure you have all the desirable requisites. (*To the First.*) You have had experience with trees and flowers?

First—(*as if he had learned it*) Yes, ma'am, I was chief gardener for two years at Lord Popinjay's estate in Devonshire. No doubt you have read of his rare varieties of roses. They are famous throughout the Isles.

Mrs. D.—Indeed! And you left him?

First—(*glibly*) To see this great and glorious country of yours.

Mrs. D.—But of course you understand I cannot pay you what his lordship did.

First—Madam, permit me to say my wages are a second consideration with me. I have saved enough money while in his lordship's employ to make them so, and I

assure you I am quite willing to work for whatever you feel free to pay me.

Mrs. D.—*(with a sigh)* You sound almost too good to be true. *(Smiling.)* I will hire you and we will discuss your wages and your work a little later. My maid will show you your quarters over the garage. Lizette?

Lizette—Yes, madam.

Mrs. D.—Show the young man his room. *(First follows Lizette out at left.) (To second)* And you? What recommendation do you bring?

Second—*(as if he had learned it)* I worked four years for the late James Jemmijohn, prominent flower dealer and exporter of seeds and bulbs. A short time ago he passed peacefully away, and I had no desire to work on there. Pure sentiment, madam, pure sentiment. I always have it and I assure you I shall have the same for you and your gardens.

Mrs. D.—*(amused.)* That's nice.

Second—Your gardens remind me of his, the plan of the walks, the shrubbery. It will be a pleasure to work here. In the matter of wages, I feel as my fellow Smith does—they are a second consideration when contentment of place is everything.

Mrs. D.—It seems I have fallen on an ideal company. *(To Third.)* And you, what is your story? *(Second goes off at left.)*

Third—*(whose imagination has been outdone.)* I haven't any.

Mrs. D.—*(who has begun to expect anything)* Haven't any? But didn't you—

Third—*(misinterpreting in his nervousness)* Yes, Madam, I did, and, as I thought, have a good one, but they—they have outdone me.

Mrs. D.—What do you mean?

Third—*(twisting his cap)* Theirs were so much better.

Mrs. D.—You are very vague, but you look honest, and I believe I'll hire you.

Third—Thank you, madam.

Mrs. D.—It is only fair to give you a trial, and I shall expect you to do odd jobs for my maid when she asks you. Have you ever worked before?

Third—(*quickly*) Yes, oh, yes, madam.

Mrs. D.—Doing what?

Third—(*desperately clutching at an idea*) Shoeing horses, madam.

Mrs. D.—Shoeing horses? And why did you give it up?

Third—(*desperately*) Well, you see, madam, there were no horses.

Mrs. D.—(*laughing*) Of course. How stupid of me. But why didn't you go in the automobile business?

Third—I had a horror of it, madam, a natural horror. My great-grandfather had it, too. It—it runs in the family.

Mrs. D.—Your great-grandfather? But there were no automobiles in his day.

Third—No, but he dreamed of them—had regular nightmares about them.

Mrs. D.—I suppose you are fond of flowers?

Third—(*sweetly*) I adore them. I used to have a flower all my own, in a pot in our kitchen. It lived for years.

Mrs. D.—Poor boy! (*Smiling.*) Well, I won't tax your imagination any longer. You are hired on faith. That's all for now. (*She watches him, smiling as he goes off at left. On the threshold he passes Lizette entering, and she gives him a scrutinizing stare.*)

Lizette—(*entering*) Madam is to hire all of them?

Mrs. D.—(*turning*) Yes, Lizette, all of them. (*Lizette sighs.*) You don't like them?

Lizette—I don't trust them. They—they—what do you say—do not look the part.

Mrs. D.—You are prejudiced. A finer looking lot of men I never saw.

Lizette—(shaking her head wisely) 'Ah, that's the trouble. Their hands—ex-quis-ite hands, *helas*, they are too fine.

Mrs. D.—You can't shake my faith, *Lizette*, and we shall have paradise at *Fleurmont*.

(Mrs. Dixby Moore, a large, florid, haughty woman of fifty, and son, Clarence, appear at French door. The less said about Clarence's appearance the better for him. His chief characteristics are length, leanness and a tiny mustache. Both are dressed in the height of fashion.)

Clarence—My dear *Mrs. Davenport*, what a charming spot your back yard is.

Mrs. Moore—(laughing affectedly) Yes, *Mrs. Davenport*, *Clarence* went into ecstasies over your garden, and you know he never enthuses over flowers.

Mrs. D.—That's something I never can quite forgive in *Clarence*. Otherwise he is a nice boy. *(To Mrs. M.)* Sit down, do. *(Mrs. M. takes chair by table. Mrs. D. draws up chair and sits beside her and Clarence lounges on the lower end of the davenport.)*

Clarence—(lighting a cigarette) Of course I'm a nice boy—doing everything you ask of me.

Mrs. D.—Yes, and sometimes I think I've asked too much.

Clarence—Now, now!

Mrs. D.—But suppose you just can't fall in love with *any* of them.

Clarence—Impossible, impossible, not to fall in love with a niece of yours. By Jove, I'd make myself.

Mrs. M.—It will be so nice for *Clarence* to have a wife and settle down. He's been so restive.

Clarence—Really, mother, you sound as if I were a horse.

Mrs. M.—And I should love his wife, I'm sure, just because she was *his* wife.

Clarence—That's mighty nice of you, mother.

Mrs. D.—Of course they are dear girls. I can tell by their letters. But I haven't the slightest idea how they look and I suppose they do need a lot of training. (*Lizette enters hurriedly from left.*)

Lizette—Pardon, madam, but the new gardener has put the salt from the freezer in the tulip bed.

Mrs. D.—(*rising*) Mercy, Lizette! (*To Mrs. M.*) I'll be with you again in a minute. (*Follows Lizette off at left.*)

Clarence—Ha, ha, by Jove! (*Gets up and struts about.*)

Mrs. M.—She's perfectly foolish about her gardens.

Clarence—She has a right to be eccentric. She's reached the top of the ladder, er—socially.

Mrs. M.—(*with some spite*) Only through her husband. She was a nobody.

Clarence—Uncle Mark loved her. By Jove, he did; and it was said of him he knew a good thing when he saw it.

Mrs. M.—Your grandfather never cared for her.

Clarence—Grandfather was something of a nut, I'm told.

Mrs. M.—Clarence! You're a nice one to talk about your late grandfather when he left you all his fortune, and I judge you'll need it to fit out and educate a wife from the backwoods. If only you had been sensible you might have had any of the girls of your own set, but, no, you dillied, dallied.

Clarence—But you have forgiven me for all that, now that I have really promised to marry.

Mrs. M.—Do sit down, Clarence. You make me crazy walking about.

Clarence—(*flopping on the sofa*) How could a fellow help being nervous while he waits to get a first glimpse of his future bride.

Mrs. D.—(*entering from left*) The poor boy. The cook asked him to empty the freezer and he had an idea

salt was good for tulips. You see, he's always worked with horses.

Mrs. M.—Of course you discharged him.

Mrs. D.—(*sitting*) I didn't have the heart to.

Mrs. M.—But at that rate your gardens will suffer.

Mrs. D.—I think not. I have experts in the other two.

Mrs. M.—You have two more?

Mrs. D.—Um-um. I am indulging myself this summer in my pet hobby.

Mrs. M.—Of course Fleurmont is delightful.

Mrs. D.—But it might be made far more so.

Clarence—My dear Mrs. Davenport, allow me to say that after—after I become a member of the family, Fleurmont shall be made into what you would have it.

Mrs. D.—My dear boy. (*Goes to him.*) You couldn't say anything that would make me happier. Let me kiss you. (*She kisses him on the forehead.*)

(*Enter Lizette at left.*)

Lizette—They have come, madam.

Mrs. D.—(*turning*) Oh, I'm glad. Bring them right in, Lizette. (*Lizette starts for door.*) Lizette!

Lizette—Yes, madam.

Mrs. D.—You might fix the tray with cookies and milk. I suppose they are hungry, poor dears. Bring it in here.

Lizette—Yes, madam. (*Goes off left.*)

Mrs. D.—Oh, dear, I'm so excited.

(*Lizette returns, followed by the three nieces. They are, to speak plainly, countrified in their clothes and appearance, but very pretty and of excellent possibilities. They have left their baggage in the hall, but we are sure they have brought carpet bags. They are shy and Sarah Maud, who, because she is a little bolder than the rest, has been unanimously made spokesman.*)

(*Mrs. D., delighted, runs to kiss them.*)

Mrs. D.—My dear girls! My dear nieces!

(Mrs. M. gives them one look and closes her eyes with a well-bred inward shudder. Clarence, who sees the possibilities, is amused.)

Mrs. D.—(to Mrs. M.) My three nieces, Mary Ann Lee, Sarah Maud Lee, and Julia May Lee.

(Mrs. M. bows stiffly; so do the girls.)

Mrs. D.—My dears, Mrs. Dixby Moore and her son, Clarence.

Clarence—(bowing elaborately) I am delighted—charmed!

Mrs. D.—Mrs. Moore and her son are to be our guests for a few weeks.

Clarence—So you see, it's not to be a mere passing acquaintance.

Mrs. D.—No, indeed, it's not; and I'm sure we are to have a jolly summer.

Clarence brings up chairs and they all sit about the table, except Mrs. M., who pulls her chair back a little to get a better perspective. Lizette enters with the tea wagon.)

Mrs. D.—That's it. Sit down, girls. We'll begin by having a cozy little lunch. I know you're faint.

Clarence—Of course they are. Now, let me make myself useful. I'll pass the cookies.

(Exit Lizette. Clarence passes the cookies and Mrs. D. the milk. The girls regard Clarence from the corners of their eyes and murmur a soft "thank you.")

Clarence—(to Mrs. M.) Mother, you won't partake? Oh, no, I remember, you don't take milk on Thursdays.

Clarence—(sitting next to Sarah Maud) Now, I say, isn't this delightful? Don't you think it's delightful?

Sarah Maud—Oh, yes, very.

Clarence—(trying to be sweet.) (To Julia May.) And you?

Julia May—Oh, yes, very.

Clarence—(to *Mary Ann*) And you?

Mary Ann—Oh, yes, very.

Clarence—There, I thought you'd think so.

Mrs. D.—(munching a cookie to be sociable.) Did you have a good journey my dears?

(*Julia May and Mary Ann look to Sarah Maud.*)

Sarah M.—(glibly) Yes, Aunt Susan, we did. The waits were short and we enjoyed the scenery. At Haverly Station we were much interested in watching people and we amused ourselves on the train by imagining what you were like.

Mrs. D.—And you're not disappointed?

All Three—No, indeed!

Mary Ann—(finding her voice at last) And I think it's lovely here. I never saw such gardens. At home we had no time or space for flowers. We raised just vegetables for market.

Julia M.—(with a sigh) And we had to work pretty hard at times.

Clarence—(with real sympathy) A rotten shame!

Julia M.—But I suppose it's been good for us. At least so papa says. Why, some days we had to —

Mary Ann—(giving her sister a nudge) Hush! (In her effort to check *Julia M.*'s readiness to tell tales, she upsets her milk glass in her lap.)

Sarah M.—Oh, Mary Ann!

(*Mrs. M.* again closes her eyes, this time for a longer period. *Sarah Maud* starts in scrubbing off the stains vigorously.)

Mrs. D.—(offering her napkin) Never mind, dearie. Don't worry about it.

Sarah Maud—But it's her best dress.

Julia M.—(in a woebegone voice) Her very best, and was to do for all summer.

Mrs. D.—We'll get her another.

Clarence—(taking her empty glass and refilling it) Do have some more. (*Mary A. hesitates.*) Do, please take it. Don't be afraid. A body was never known to upset two glasses at one sitting.

Mary A.—(taking it) Thank you.

Sarah M.—You're right. It will probably be my turn next.

Mrs. M.—I think, Clarence, we'd better go now.

Clarence—Oh, I say, mother, I want another cooky and some more milk.

Mrs. M.—Then I fear I must leave you.

Clarence—Oh, don't, mother; it would be so dreadful to walk home alone.

Mrs. M.—Perhaps the young ladies will go with you as far as the garden gate. (*She goes to French door.*)

Clarence—(foolishly) As far as the garden gate. Ha, ha! Sounds like a song title.

Mrs. D.—Run along, you ridiculous boy.

(*Clarence goes to his mother and they go off.*)

Clarence—(calling back) Ta-ta.

(*The girls murmur "good-bye."*)

Mary A.—Is she a very cross woman?

Mrs. D.—No, my dear, she is a fool.

Mary A.—Oh!

Mrs. D.—Now, I want you all to stand up. I haven't had half a chance to get a look at you, my dears. (*She rises and they stand up beside her.*)

Mrs. D.—(playfully) Get in line. (*They get in line laughing, and Mrs. D. surveys them from a little distance.*) Mary Ann is tallest, Sarah Maud next, then Julia May.

Sarah M.—Do you like us?

Mrs. D.—Do I like you? You dears, I'm in love with you, already.

Julia M.—But you're going to improve us?

Mrs. D.—Oh, dear, yes.

Mary A.—I'm sure we need it.

Mrs. D.—Did you want to come?

Mary A.—Very much, but of course we were a little afraid—that is we knew you to be a very grand person.

Julia M.—With a French maid.

Sarah M.—And a garden of rare trees and flowers.

Mrs. D.—(*laughing delightedly*) And you let that bother you. I'm ashamed.

Mary A.—And that you entertained aristocratic people.

Mrs. D.—Pooh!

Julia M.—Was that Mrs. Moore *very* aristocratic?

Mrs. D.—Oh, terribly. (*anxiously*) You haven't told me how you liked Clarence.

Mary A.—(*weakly*) He was very nice.

Mrs. D.—(*ashamed of herself*) Don't you think he has nice eyes?

Sarah M.—(*bluntly*) But he hasn't any chin.

Mrs. D.—(*gaining enthusiasm*) And nice hands?

Julia M.—So white and fine.

Mrs. D.—He is very rich.

Julia M.—I thought so. Do-do you like him very much, Aunt Susan?

Mrs. D.—Yes, indeed. I consider him an excellent catch for any girl. (*Starts to door.*) Come, let's go up to your rooms, now.

(*Girls follow her.*)

Sarah M.—Then he isn't married?

Mrs. D.—(*quickly*) Oh, no.

Sarah M.—Well, I'm not surprised.

Mrs. D.—(*at door; turns.*) Not surprised! Why, dear?

Sarah M.—(*casually*) Well, I couldn't imagine anyone wanting him.

(*They go off as the curtain falls.*)

CURTAIN

ACT II.

(Three weeks later. Morning.)

(Mary A., dressed becomingly in a garden frock and carrying a large shade hat on her wrist, sits on the window seat at right, looking out on the garden. Presently, John Smith, the first gardener, appears at French door and stands, leaning against the frame of it.)

Mary A.—(turning) Come in, please. There's no one about. Since Aunt Susan's been away visiting there's no early riser.

First—But, what about you?

Mary A.—Oh, I'm taking her place. I like to get up early in summer. The garden is loveliest then.

First—(entering and taking a seat beside her) But you haven't been in the garden for days. You've deserted me.

Mary A.—(with a sigh) I've had too much to do. Study, study, study, from early morning until late at night.

First—Study?

Mary A.—Um-um. Of course I do enjoy it, and Aunt Susan is awfully kind to let me have such fine teachers, but really, I'd much rather be in the garden (smiling) with you.

First—That's nice of you to say so. When do you finish your course?

Mary A.—Oh, dear, I don't know. Never, I guess.

First—What kind of studies are you taking up?

Mary A.—Well, really, I don't know whether you'd call them *studies*. That is, well I'm learning how to enter a room gracefully, how to talk, and dance, and—flirt.

First—(laughing) I see. They're making a society belle of you.

Mary A.—(rising and walking to the piano) I don't like it a bit, but naturally I don't say anything, because I

need it, I know—the training, I mean. When you have been brought up on a farm with no advantages, you do get rather ordinary, I suppose.

First—(rising and following her to the piano) I never thought you were ordinary, and I saw you the first day you came.

Mary A.—(laughing) Oh, I know I wasn't ordinary that day. I was the most *extraordinary* being that ever walked these paths.

First—You were beautiful, even then.

Mary A.—Now you're trying to be nice. (Slyly.) Does that sound like the words of an experienced flirt?

First—I don't know; but you're not going to be one of them—one of those foolish, empty-headed girls who don't mean what they say and who don't know half they're saying.

Mary A.—You seem to know a lot about *those girls*.

First—I do, and I detest them.

Mary A.—(earnestly) Tell me, please, who you are and what you're doing here. I know you're something more than a gardener. (He smiles.) You ought to tell me.

First—Why?

Mary A.—Because I ask you. You are more mysterious than Lohengrin, whose story I've just been reading.

First—Mystery is interesting. You wouldn't think about me half so much if you didn't think I was mysterious.

Mary A.—When are you going to tell me?

First—Perhaps never.

Mary A.—Now, you're horrid, because you know I'm curious.

First—Only curious?

Mary A.—(shyly) Well—no.

First—It depends wholly on yourself whether I tell you.

Mary A.—But—but, don't you see my position here? Only yesterday I found out why Aunt Susan sent for us. She expects one of us to marry Clarence Moore.

First—One of you—but.

Mary A.—It all depends on Clarence. Whichever one he chooses must be his wife.

First—Damn Clarence!

Mary A.—Mister Smith!

First—Well, he's no business mooning around here. Why doesn't he get an honest job?

Mary A.—He's too rich. And please don't say things about the man who might be my future husband.

First—Only to myself, then. I suppose I may do that.

Mary A.—(smiling) But even that isn't very nice.

(Sarah Maud and the third gardener appear at the French door. Sarah Maud is bewitchingly gowned in plaid gingham. Third's fingers are bandaged.)

Sarah M.—Hulloa! For heavens sake, Mary Ann!

(They exchange glances of surprise and the two gardeners scowl at each other.)

Sarah M.—(to First) Oh, we've had the delightfull-est stroll through the garden. Mr. Smith has shown me every flower on the place, and he knows so much.

First—I've seen no evidences of his knowledge.

Sarah M.—Hear, hear, I won't have you saying things like that.

Third—(to Mary Ann) For some reason, Miss Mary, he wants to get rid of me.

Sarah M.—(in a dramatic voice) Jealousy!

Third—And heaven knows I earn my pay. Up with the birdies and working the long day through. Oh, well, well.

Sarah M.—(coming down to the table) I know what it is. He wants *me* to marry Clarence and get him out of the way and he thinks as long as you're here—

Mary A.—Sarah Maud Lee!

Sarah M.—Well, I don't care.

Third—Mighty fine of her to be so honest I'll say. I've puzzled my head the last week to find out why it is he holds that grudge. I'll sleep better now.

Sarah M.—(going back to the French door.) Poor Gar-gar!

Mary A.—Gar-gar!

Sarah M.—Yes, I call him that, now. Pet name for gardener.

Mary A.—But, Sarah Maud, you oughtn't to be—to be so familiar. You can't encourage other men as long as there's Clarence.

Sarah M.—I've no intention of marrying Clarence; not if he were the last man on earth. He's a prune; so there—and if Aunt Susan thinks—

Mary A.—You'll do as Aunt Susan says, dearie, and if Clarence Moore chooses you for his future wife, you it must be.

Sarah M.—Ah! But I'll see that he doesn't choose me. (Mincing to front of stage.) At what hour does Milord Clarence arise? (The others laugh.) Noon, methinks. (She goes back to Third. They talk.)

First—(to Mary A.) She's been reading legends, too.

Mary A.—Yes, I believe it's considered part of a good education.

First—(seriously) I believe it is.

Mary A.—(coming down to table) You haven't shown me the garden.

First—(following her) You haven't given me the chance. You don't dare take the risks of being seen the way your sister does.

Mary A.—Sarah Maud dares anything, but—but of course it would be bad if they discovered we were friends.

First—And such good friends! We are, aren't we?

Mary A.—(A bit unwillingly) Yes, I suppose we are.

First—And we can't help it, can we?

Mary A.—No, I suppose we can't—now. It's rather late to try to, but I don't know what Aunt Susan would say.

First—I'm sorry if Aunt Susan doesn't love me.

Mary A.—You mustn't joke about it. It's—it's tragic. (*Quickly.*) Come, let's go out and look at some of the flowers. (*She goes to French door.*)

First—We'll begin with the pansy bed. I've a jolly variety to show you that will take a long time.

Sarah M.—Where are you going?

Mary A.—Let us out. I'm to have a lesson in pansy raising.

(*Sarah M. and Third go over to piano, Sarah M. perching on the seat.*)

Sarah M.—Throw a pansy in Clarence's window for me, will you? One with a saucy face. (*Mary A. and First go off by French door.*) (*To Third.*) I'd play you a piece if I dared, one I used to play on the melodeon at home.

Third—(*looking at her with adoring eyes*) Oh, I say, please!

Sarah M.—I'm afraid it will wake his lordship.

Third—You're always thinking of him.

Sarah M.—Jealous! (*he grins.*) (*During the following conversation she plays a soft, gay little accompaniment.*)

Sarah M.—(*looking at him with smiling but searching eyes*) Do you know I think you're delightfully mysterious, as mysterious as—as—oh, you know, what was that knight's name who wouldn't tell his lady love who he was.

Third—(*with sudden inspiration*) Sir Galahad.

Sarah M.—Yes, Sir Galahad Aren't you clever! You're just like him, in fact I think he must have looked like you.

Third—Thanks.

Sarah M.—Now, you can't say I'm not nice to you. You've been looking like a pepper box the whole morning just because I happened to mention Clarence once or twice.

Third—Sarah Maud, I'm sick of my job, beastly sick of it. I've been at it now for three weeks and I'm sick of it.

Sarah M.—Poor 'ittle boy. Does he scratch his hannies in the dirty ground? (*She stops playing.*) But, there, he has me to tie them up. (*Smiles at him bewitchingly.*)

Third—Sarah Maud, I wish you'd marry me. I'm awfully in love with you.

Sarah Maud—(*rising*) I would, but Mary Ann would never let me.

Third—Hang Mary Ann!

Sarah M.—This business of Clarence has got to be settled first. He might, Gar-gar dear, choose me. You did.

Third—(*coming down to table*) If he does—

Sarah M.—(*covering her ears*) Don't say it, Gar-gar. Don't say the dreadful words.

Third—Let's elope. Say, I tell you. I'll quit today, go into town, get some decent clothes, come back here and meet you tonight by the gate—

Sarah M.—(*pacing back and forth*) Oh, don't don't, Gar-gar, you tempt me. It is too alluring. Besides, there's a full moon tonight.

Third—(*savagely*) Hang the moon!

Sarah M.—(*stopping by the table*) It—it wouldn't be fair to Aunt Susan especially while she's away visiting.

Third—Hang Aunt Susan!

Sarah M.—Gar-gar, dear, really you ought to have been an interior decorator. You've a passion for hanging things.

Third—I'd like to hang everyone but you and me.

Sarah M.—You expect me to do just as you want, but you won't even tell me who you are, and I know you're somebody interesting.

Third—Wish I was. Then maybe you'd love me.

Sarah M.—But I do love you, Gar-gar.

Third—Then, marry me.

Sarah M.—Have you forgotten Clarence? (*She goes back to piano seat.*)

Third—Hang—you can get rid of Clarence.

Sarah M.—I know it; and I intend to, but I've got to get rid of him *first*, before I can marry you. (*Soft playing.*)

Third—Rats! I don't see why.

Sarah M.—Don't be so tragic, Gar-gar. It doesn't become your type of face.

Third—(*walking to back of stage.*) You're making fun of me. Everyone makes fun of me.

Sarah M.—There, there, it is a shame, yes it is. (*She starts toward him, just as Julia May and the second gardener appear at the French door.*)

Sarah M.—(*taken back to say the least*) Well, of all things! (*Third turns.*)

Second—(*to Third*) Smith, I told you to put the loam around the rose bushes. What are you doing here? (*He enters, Julia M. close behind him.*)

Third—The same thing as you are, I reckon.

Sarah M.—(*putting an arm through Third's*) Let's go out, Gar-gar, and I'll help you. (*She sweeps past Second with a haughty glance, pulling Third along with her and they go out by French door.*)

Julia M.—(*in an awe-struck voice*) She called him Gar-gar!

Second—(*smiling*) Yes?

Julia—But that's a pet name.

Second—Yes?

Julia M.—And she's only known him for three weeks, two weeks, really, for we haven't been in the garden this last week.

Second—It isn't always how long you've known a person; it's how much you've seen of him.

Julia M.—(coming down to chair by the table and perching on the arm.) I've seen rather much of you, haven't I?

Second—Yes. (He is much amused at her.)

Julia—And I'm likely to see a lot more of you.

Second—(coming to back of her chair) I hope so.

Julia M.—(with some disgust) But there—there's Clarence!

Second—(mournfully) There's always Clarence.

Julia M.—Yes, there's always Clarence. Poor Clarence.

Second—Don't tell me you pity him.

Julia M.—I can't help it. (Second groans.)

Second—I suppose the next thing you do is marry him out of pity.

Julia M.—No, I won't, and besides, he might not choose me. I don't think he will, for really I'm not half as attractive as my sisters, do you think so?

Second—That's a nice question to ask a prejudiced man.

Julia M.—Why, my nose is pug and Mary Ann has a beautiful nose and my eyes are green and Sarah Maud has divine eyes, an artist who came to Freeport wanted to paint her picture. Oh, I know I'm plain and I'm afraid it doesn't bother me as much as it ought. Mary Ann says it doesn't and she tries to comb my hair to give me a more dignified look but you can't give a dignified look to a person who hasn't already one, do you think you can?

Second—(smiling) No, I'm afraid you can't.

Julia M.—Do you think it's better for a girl to be beautiful than to be wise?

Second—I'm afraid I don't. You see, it's this way. Beauty fades, but wisdom increases with years.

Julia M.—Oh, you are comforting, and it's so nice to have someone to encourage you. Sometimes when I look in a mirror I do get down-hearted, but hereafter I shall say to myself, "Julia May Lee, improve your mind, if you would be attractive," and it's going to be easy to do for I love to study.

Second—Have you read all the books I gave you?

Julia M.—Every one.

Second—Then you shall have the rest.

Julia M.—Some parts of them were hard for me to understand, but I marked the difficult passages and you will tell me. (*With genuine admiration.*) You're so wonderful.

Second—(*with a bow*) Thank you, mademoiselle. That is the best compliment I ever received.

Julia M.—You're so different from the farmers I have known that I can't help thinking about you.

Second—I'm glad you do.

Julia M.—I've thought all sorts of things about you—nice things.

Second—Thank you.

Julia M.—You're the most interesting person I ever met. I used to imagine a man like you, but I never thought I should ever meet one really. I'm quite sure you must be a writer or a poet or—

Second—Don't.

Julia M.—Wouldn't you like to be one? I would. In fact that's what I'm thinking of becoming one of these days. I'd love to write about things and people and have whole families and villages living in my brain. I've written a story since I came here.

Second—Will you tell it to me? I love stories.

Julia—Yes, if you like. It's about a young man who has great ability and is very brilliant and whose parents will not let him do what he wants, so he runs away and

gets a job for himself to earn money to let him study and become the man he would want to be.

Second—What sort of a job does he get?

Julia M.—Well, he loves flowers, so he hires himself as gardener to a rich old lady.

Second—That's interesting.

Julia May—But wait. The rich old lady has a beautiful companion, a young girl, who is an orphan. She, too, has a great ambition but the old lady is very exacting, and demands so much of her that she has little time to devote to her studies that she loves. One day she meets the gardener, and somehow—I don't know just how, she begins telling him about herself and he promises to help her, oh, in lots of ways—*(She stops suddenly.)*

Second—Go on. You have stopped at the most interesting place.

Julia M.—She—she falls in love with him and *(she covers her face with her hands)* Oh, dear, that's all.

Second—*(taking down her hands)* Doesn't he fall in love with her? Doesn't he?

Julia M.—I—I don't know. I—I haven't decided, yet.

Second—Oh, but he ought to, you know.

Julia M.—Yes, I know he ought to. *(Sarah M., followed by Third, comes in suddenly by French door. Close behind, Mary A. and First.)*

Sarah M.—Whew! *(She comes down to table and gives a suspicious glance at Julia M., who gets down from the chair arm quickly.)* Come here, Gar-gar, and let me tighten the bandage on your little finger. *(Third obeys and she ties the bandage.)*

Mary A.—Poor fellow, he's all cut up. *(She sits on window seat at right, First standing beside her.)*

First—*(laughing)* Too bad, Smith, but console yourself. Sweet peas don't have thorns.

Second—*(to Mary A.)* You've been over the garden?

Mary A.—Just this end of it.

Second—(turning to *Julia M.*) Permit me, mademoiselle, to take you over the grounds some day soon.

Julia M.—Oh, I'd love to! Let's see. What hours have I free? English at nine, French at ten, etiquette at eleven, dancing at twelve—

Sarah M.—(with finality) Lunch!

Julia M.—(going on glibly) Literature at one, piano at two, voice culture at three, philosophy at four.

Sarah M.—Dinner.

Second—(to *Julia M.*) Poor child!

Mary A.—You might get up at six.

Julia M.—(to *second*) Would it take more than three hours to go over the garden?

Second—It might. It all depends on how fast we move.

Julia M.—Oh!

Third—Why not take the dog-cart and race around? That would get you back for breakfast.

Sarah M.—Impudence!

Julia M.—(slowly) I think I'll decide to go tomorrow.

Mary A.—You'd better. Aunt Susan will be back day after.

Julia M.—(with a sigh) Of course it wouldn't do to be caught walking with you. Yes, I'll go tomorrow, that is if it's all right for you.

Second—I'll make it all right. Thank you mademoiselle.

Sarah M.—Oh, you know French, too. I will say I never heard of such unusual gardeners. (She goes to piano seat and sits. Exchange glances.)

Mary A.—(suddenly) Hush, a door closed somewhere upstairs.

Sarah M.—His lordship has risen.

Julia M.—Oh dear, you'll have to go.

First—We intend to. Fall in line, boys. (*They fall in line one behind the other.*) Mark time! One, two, (*They mark time.*) Forward—MARCH!

(*They file out by the French door in perfect step.*)

Sarah M.—(*running to the window at left.*) Aren't they a scream?

Julia M.—(*sitting on the window seat at left*) Do you know—I think we are like those fairy princesses of old who entertained their lovers secretly. I used to imagine myself one at Freeport, but I never thought I should be so like one.

Mary A.—Who do you suppose they are?

Julia M.—Let's not try to find out. It's more interesting.

Sarah M.—I love Gar-gar just as he is, but oh, dear, he's awfully helpless. I don't believe he ever did a stroke of work in his life, and he makes an awful fuss about his quarters in the garage.

Julia M.—Very likely he is the son of a millionaire, and accustomed to a grand suite of rooms.

Mary A.—John has said some very queer things, too, as if he were used to a very different sort of life.

Julia M.—I'm sure *my* John—

Sarah M.—*Your* John—

Julia M.—Well, I had to distinguish somehow, didn't I? Besides, he asked me to call him John.

Sarah M.—He did! Well, I didn't know he had it in him.

Julia M.—I'm sure he is a writer of some kind. He talks so beautifully and has such an imagination. I think he's wonderful.

Sarah M.—Well, at any rate, he's better than Clarence.

Mary A.—Oh, dear! Isn't the suspense awful?

Sarah M.—Suspense?

Mary A.—Yes, about Clarence deciding.

Julia M.—(with conviction) I don't think there's any suspense. I think Clarence's choice has been made.

*Sarah M.—*You don't!

*Julia M.—*Um-um. I think he's going to choose you.

Sarah M.—ME! (*She falls back onto the window seat.*)

Julia M.—(calmly) He regards you with love in his eye.

Sarah M.—(sitting up) Oh, Lord!

*Mary A.—*I don't know about that. He told me Julia May's sweet innocence got him.

*Julia M.—*But it won't get mamma. She wants beauty. No, it's Sarah Maud, I'm sure.

Sarah M.—(coming down to piano) But it won't be for long, believe me. (*Whistle without.*)

*Mary A.—*Sh! He's coming.

Sarah M.—(making dart for door at left) Tra-la! I'm off. (*She goes out at left just as Clarence, immaculately and appropriately dressed, saunters in at right.*)

Clarence—(bowing) Ah, good morning. I say, how are you for a stroll? It's only eight-thirty and a half-hour to spare. (*He looks about the room.*) I say, where's Sarah Maud?

Julia M.—(coming down to table) She's gone upstairs to prepare her French. (*Slyly*) Won't we do?

*Clarence—*Oh, most certainly. I was just wondering, that's all.

*Mary A.—*She always forgets it until the last minute, and we had a terribly difficult lesson. (*Enter Mrs. M. at right.*)

*Mrs. M.—*Oh, here you are. (*To Mary A. and Julia M.*) My roses!

Clarence—(gloomily) And your thorn.

*Mrs. M.—*Now, Clarence, you know better.

*Clarence—*Now, mother, you know I'm a thorn in your side.

Mrs. M.—(to girls) Isn't he a tease. I wish you'd take him in hand. You can see I've failed miserably. (Clarence goes to piano and begins to drum.) He treats me with no respect whatever.

Clarence—I say, someone's got to take a walk with me. (Drumming.) Eeny—meeny—

Mrs. M.—Clarence!

Julia M.—(impishly) Perhaps your mother will.

Clarence—I say, you're mean.

Julia M.—I say, you're rude!

Mary A.—Why don't you walk with yourself? Then you'll be sure of excellent company. (She goes to door at left, laughing.) (To Mrs. M.) Really, you must excuse us. We have French next.

Clarence—And you won't—

Julia M.—(following Mary A.) And we can't go a-walking with you.

Clarence—(with contempt) French! What do you want to study French for?

Julia M.—Well, there are always plenty of French counts round about looking for eligible wives, and, well, it would be bad if we didn't understand when they were proposing. Au revoir. (They go off at left.)

Mrs. M.—(going over to Clarence) Clarence, I'm disgusted with you.

Clarence—That's right. Blame me. It's not so easy.

Mrs. M.—What's not so easy?

Clarence—Getting a wife.

Mrs. M.—(with sarcasm) No, I suppose not—with three beautiful girls to choose from. Most men in a like position would have been married by now. Clarence, why don't you make up your mind?

Clarence—(sulkily) How do you know but what I have?

Mrs. M.—Well, I'm waiting.

Clarence—Waiting?

Mrs. M.—To hear what you've decided. Which is the fortunate one?

Clarence—Sarah Maud.

Mrs. M.—Sarah Maud

Clarence—There, I suppose so. Something's wrong with the choice.

Mrs. M.—Not at all, my son. On the whole, I like her immensely. But have you let her know?

Clarence—Not yet.

Mrs. M.—*(with more sarcasm)* What's the delay for? If I were you I'd be about it. She's pretty, clever and very entertaining.

Clarence—She's that all right. She keeps you guessing too.

Mrs. M.—I really think that of the three she is the prettiest. Her hair is lovely, just enough of a wave and does up so well.

Clarence—It's an unusual color, too; those Titian lights.

Mrs. M.—Ah, yes, those Titian lights.

(Sarah M., pretending she thinks nobody is in the room, steals on at left. She wears an ugly straw-colored wig of short hair. A piece of black court plaster covers one front tooth. Mrs. M. sees her and gasps. Sarah M. pretends she has tried to escape, then stops and confronts them.)

Clarence—My god! Is—is—is it Sarah Maud?

Sarah M.—*(feigning embarrassment)* Yes, it's me. *(With a sigh.)* I didn't know anyone was in the room, and I stole down to get my belt I left on the davenport. I thought I wouldn't meet anyone and I took the risk. I'm sorry. I know I'm a sight and I never meant anyone to know I really looked like this.

Mrs. M.—But your hair!

Sarah M.—Oh, I'm sorry to disillusion you, Clarence but I suppose the truth will out and you might as well know first as last. That's a wig I've been wearing. This is my real hair—yellow and straight and ugly.

Clarence.—This is cruel, Sarah Maud.

Sarah M.—Isn't it!

Mrs. M.—This is preposterous. Does your Aunt Susan know—of these falsities?

Sarah M.—No, and I haven't had the heart to tell her. Aunt Susan worships beauty.

Mrs. M.—And, do you realize what you are doing?

Sarah M.—I hope so.

Mrs. M.—You are deliberately deceiving people.

Sarah M.—(*almost in tears*) You won't tell Aunt Susan?

Mrs. M.—I think she ought to be told.

Clarence.—It would be saving her from the worst shock of her life.

Sarah M.—I think you're rather hard on me. When one has two beautiful sisters, one naturally wants to be beautiful, and I got tired of hearing Mary Ann's and Julia May's praises being sung so—so I thought I—I would try to be beautiful like them.

Mrs. M.—Which was morally wrong and the worst form of deceit. However, I'm glad you are found out, as far as my son and myself are concerned. Of course you understand any prospects you may have had to matrimony, that is as far as my son is concerned, are of no account.

Sarah M.—(*humbly*) I understand. I know I'm not much on looks when you take me unawares. (*Exit left.*)

Mrs. M.—Clarence!

Clarence.—Ye gods!

(*A ripple of laughter off stage at left, then another, more smothered.*)

Mrs. M.—Hush! (*They listen. More smothered laughter.*) Clarence, they are making a fool of you. That girl did that in fun.

Clarence.—Oh, lord! not if I know girls. There was nothing funny about that.

Mrs. M.—Clarence, listen to me. Those girls are disgusted with you. This affair has proven it. Sarah Maud is in love with you, of course.

Clarence—In love with me.

Mrs. M.—This last act has proven it. Yes, I am sure she is in love with you.

(Enter Mary A. and Julia M. at right.)

Mary A.—No English this morning. Miss Bidger-ton is sick.

Mrs. M.—Oh! *(With great sympathy.)* But then you can find time for other things.

Clarence—For a walk with me for instance.

Mrs. M.—Clarence, I thought you had something special to do this morning.

Clarence—*(stupidly)* Something special?

Mrs. M.—*(getting angry)* If you don't recall it, you'd better follow me and I'll tell you. *(She starts off at left.)* Come.

Clarence—But, I say, mother. Can't you tell me a little later?

Mrs. M.—No, I can't. Come. *(She goes off at left and he follows, crestfallen.)*

Julia M.—Of all things. What has got into Mrs. Dixby Moore? I suppose she's after Sarah Maud. Poor Sarah Maud! I'm glad I'm not pretty.

Mary A.—Oh, dear! He's probably going to propose to her first. Well, at any rate, that gives us a little leeway. *(She sits on window seat at left.)*

Julia M.—No, it doesn't. Leave it to Sarah Maud. She'll evade him somehow. I wonder which of us two he prefers. Oh, what a life!

(Enter Sarah M. She has removed her frightful wig and looks very charming.)

Sarah M.—*(running up to Mary A. and flopping down beside her.)* Oh, my senses!

Mary A.—What is it?

Sarah M.—Clarence still loves me. I met him just now and he begged me to go for a stroll with him in the garden. I know he's got some poetic idea about proposing in a rose garden, and I shall die.

Julia M.—Poor Sarah Maud! (*Goes to her and pats her cheek.*)

Sarah M.—Do you know the gardeners hate him?

Mary A.—Yes, I do.

Julia M.—Aunt Susan left them in his charge and he has set them to work as far from the house as possible.

Sarah M.—You don't suppose he suspects something?

Julia M.—No, he's too stupid.

Mary A.—I'm afraid they'll make trouble for Clarence. Last night I walked by the kitchen window, and I heard them laughing and talking in low voices as if something was afoot. And I distinctly heard the name Clarence *whispered*.

Julia M.—Oh, heavens! If they should do anything annoying. What would Aunt Susan say?

Mary A.—Of course we owe everything to Aunt Susan, and we ought—

Sarah M.—Now end by saying—"marry Clarence to please her." Well, I won't, and you wouldn't either.

Mary A.—Oh, yes, I would, but (*half weeping*) I—I don't love him.

Sarah M.—(*coming down to table*) I love Gar-gar, and only Gar-gar.

Mary A.—Sometimes I can't help thinking how little we know of these men.

Julia M.—They might be criminals.

Mary A.—Or worse!

(*Lizette runs on from left and stops in front of Mary A. and Julia M., gesticulating wildly.*)

Lizette—Mon dieu, mon dieu!

Mary A.—Lizette!

(*Sarah M. rushes up to group.*)

Lizette—(half weeping) Mon dieu, mon dieu! The silver is gone. (Draws in her breath and lets it out in one last shriek.) And the gardeners, too! (Covers her face with her apron.)

Mary A.—(shaking her) Lizette! Stop it!

Lizette—They have gone—the wretches. (Wildly.) Catch them! Catch them! Madam's silver! I just saw the last one, the fat one, running out at the gate. (She runs off and Julia M. and Mary A. follow.)

Sarah M.—My Gar-gar! (Flops on window seat.)

CURTAIN

ACT III.

(Evening of the next day. Same scene. Lights on.)

(At the rise of the curtains, the girls, dressed in semi-evening gowns, are grouped about the piano. Sarah M. is seated on the piano stool.)

Mary A.—I can't fathom it, I can't. I never shall. It didn't seem like them. (Wipes her eyes.)

Julia M.—They were so refined. But I have heard of refined burglars before.

Sarah M.—(wailing) The sad part is, I still love Gar-gar. I do, I do.

Mary A.—And I love John! Oh, oh, I shall never forget him. I—I've pictured him in prison and still I love him.

Julia M.—And my John. I don't dare picture him in prison, for I should love him all the more. His eyes would be so pathetic behind the bars. (They sob silently a moment.)

Sarah M.—He—he said he loved me—Gar-gar did!

Julia M.—(drying her eyes) John never said so exactly, but he looked it a thousand times a day and I know he would have said so, if I had given him half a chance.

Mary A.—Oh, why hadn't you? But, then, what good would it have done now?

Sarah Maud—At least she could have died a spinster. As for me, I shall never love again.

Mary A.—You forget Clarence.

Sarah M.—(crossly) For heaven's sake, let me. I consider it a blessing that I can.

Julia M.—I was so happy. He—he was my Lohengrin and now he has gone away. Mary Ann, don't you suppose they really loved us?

Mary A.—It did seem so, didn't it?

Julia M.—Think of being loved by burglars. (*Fresh sobs.*)

Sarah M.—And the wretches didn't leave one single spoon. Oh, Gar-gar, how could you? (*She plays a dull, soft little tune absently.*)

Julia M.—Is it wicked to love a burglar?

Sarah M.—(waxing sentimental) The Bible says you should love them and help them.

Julia M.—If only we could find them.

Mary A.—Perhaps they're hiding in some dismal swamp without a bite of food.

Julia M.—What a shame when they've all those knives and forks and spoons to eat it with.

Mary A.—(bravely) Come, let's forget them.

Sarah M.—I c-can't. Gar-gar's face is ever before me.

Mary A.—But we must be sensible. Don't you think I loved John as well as you loved yours, but what's the use? He's gone and he couldn't have cared much for *me* to go. That's the way I look at it.

Sarah M.—Of course. The miserable reprobate.

Mary A.—He isn't a bit worse than your Gar-gar, and you needn't call him names.

Julia M.—Well, it's this way, as Mary Ann says. They don't love us and so why should we love *them*? What's our philosophy to teach us but this?

Sarah M.—You're right, Julia May. I shall make myself hate Gar-gar for a base deciever and a thief.

Mary A.—And think how kind Aunt Susan was to them.

Sarah M.—They didn't know much either about gardens. I mean—why, now when I think of it, twice I rescued the pet rose tree from Gar-gar. Think of the nerve of him, hiring himself out as a gardener, when really he intended to burgle. (*She tucks her handkerchief in her belt with determination.*) I've wasted tears enough on such a one.

Mary A.—(*following suit*) The awful creatures!

Julia May—So ungrateful!

(*Enter Aunt Susan at right, carrying a note in her hand.*)

Mrs. D.—(*waving note wildly*) Oh, girls, girls! (*She flops into a chair and bursts out laughing. The girls cluster about her.*)

Sarah M.—What is it?

Mrs. D.—(*gasping*) It—it is too preposterous! Read—read!

(*Mary A. takes the note and reads.*)

Mary A.—"Dear Lady:—We are leaving—all three of us. We could not be bossed by Clarence. Moreover, we do not trust him, and so we have hid the silver in a hole underneath the biggest rose tree. Most respectfully, The Three Gardeners."

Sarah M.—(*dancing about*) I knew it. I knew it. My Gar-gar never could be a thief.

Mary A.—(*looking at Mrs. D.*) Hush! You ridiculous child.

Mrs. D.—What? Your what?

Sarah M.—My Gar-gar.

Mrs. D.—(*looking to the girls for help*) Your Gar-gar.

Sarah M.—Oh, I'm so happy, so happy, so happy!

Mrs. D.—(trying to catch her) Sarah Maud, explain yourself.

Sarah M.—(sobering) You see, it's this way I struck up an acquaintance with one of the gardeners one day, and—(appealingly, half hoping *Mrs. D.* will relent) we got to know each other rather well.

Mrs. D.—Sarah Maud Lee! (Pause.) Well, if that's what's been going on, I'm glad they've gone, and they have—forever—so let's get down to sense—and Clarence.

Sarah Maud—You—you don't mean you've changed your mind about Clarence?

Mrs. D.—Changed my mind about Clarence?

Sarah M.—(with some hope) That is, about our marrying him.

Mrs. D.—It is just that that I want to make clear to you. Of course I'm taking it for granted he hasn't asked any one of you yet. (Girls shake a denial.) I had hoped that on my return something would be settled.

Sarah M.—(with a great sigh) Oh, dear!

Mrs. D.—And so I have decided to take matters in my own hands.

Julia M.—(fearfully) Aunt Susan?

Mrs. D.—Yes.

Julia M.—Would—would you want any one of us to marry Clarence if—if she didn't love him?

Mrs. D.—Oftentimes, my dear, girls don't know what is good for them. The one who marries Clarence will make an excellent match financially and socially. (Smiling.) And you know what promises I've made your papa, dears. Why the best man in the world is none too good for you. He must have money or social position or brains, or all three if possible, but one at least. Clarence has two. There, I hope I've made it clear. (Taking *Sarah Maud's* hand.) Come, Sarah Maud, let's go out and dig up the silver. We'll want it to celebrate the engagement. (She leads *Sarah M.* off by the French door.)

Julia M.—(singing) They are not thieves! They are not thieves!

Mary A.—(falling in her sister's arms) Oh, Julia May, there is hope.

Julia M.—(suddenly) No, no, there isn't any hope, after all. They have g-gone, gone out of our lives forever.

Mary A.—(gazing off into space) I can't believe that. Do you know what I think?

Julia M.—(peering close into her face) What do you think?

*Mary A.—*That they will come back.

*Julia M.—*Oh! I would elope now. Just one word from John. If only it comes before Clarence decides.

Mary A.—(coming down to table) It must. It's got to.

Julia M.—(sitting on window seat at left) No, I feel as if terrible things were to happen tonight.

Mary A.—(turning) What do you mean?

*Julia M.—*Portent things. Ominous things. I feel there is a trap laid. I feel—I feel at last that Clarence means—

*Mary A.—*Oh, don't! You are morbid.

Julia M.—(her head in her hands) Oh, John, why don't you come and rescue me before it is too late.

*Mary A.—*If Clarence proposes, we must accept.

*Julia M.—*We are like those poor princesses shut up in the tower of Clarence's indecision!

(Sarah M. carrying a note enters softly by French door.)

*Sarah M.—*Girls! *(they turn)* I've a note.

*Mary A.—*A note! Good heavens! The place is full of them. *(They run to her.)*

*Sarah M.—*It's from them—the three gardeners.

*Mary A.—*What!

*Julia M.—*No!

Sarah M.—Hush! They want us to meet them to-night.

Julia M.—Tonight?

Sarah M.—Tonight, at ten, and to elope with them. They will have machines. Oh, my Gar-gar! (*She tosses the note onto the davenport.*)

Julia M.—(*stupidified*) It's — it's too thrilling.

Sarah M.—They say they will reveal their identities.

Mary A.—Oh, but Clarence!

Sarah M.—If you say that name again, I shall die.

Julia M.—(*hysterically*) Listen. We haven't refused him, not one of us, and that's all we promised Aunt Susan.

Sarah M.—(*starting for door at right*) As for me, I'm going, that's all. I love Gar-gar and no one else and I'm going to pack my suit case right now.

Julia M.—(*following her*) I—I think I'll go, too.

Sarah M.—(*reaching out a hand to her*) Come on, then. There's no time to lose.

Mary A.—Oh, what shall I do?

Sarah M.—Stay on here and marry Clarence, and heaven help you.

Julia M.—(*reaching a hand to her*) Come, Mary Ann.

Sarah M.—(*dramatically*) Is it John or is it Clarence?

Mary A.—(*taking a few steps toward them*) It's John! (*They catch her hand.*)

Sarah M.—Come on then.

(*They go off at right, just as Clarence and his mother enter at left.*)

Mrs. M.—(*with great determination*) I have made up my mind.

Clarence—(*who well knows what that means*) Yes?

Mrs. M.—And you are not to leave this room until you have proposed to Sarah Maud or one of the girls.

Clarence—But, mother—

Mrs. M.—(*turning on him*) There are no buts. You have heard me. It is now eight o'clock. I will see you at ten, and you will tell me which one it is to be.

Clarence—(*slumping into chair by table*) Yes, mother.

Mrs. M.—(*standing over him*) Remember, you are not to cross this threshold until—

Clarence—Suppose they don't choose to come down tonight.

Mrs. M.—They will come down. Mrs. Davenport and I have fixed that. It is up to you. (*She starts toward door at left.*)

Clarence—Heavens, mother, you are using slang!

Mrs. M.—(*from door*) I'll use something worse young man, if you don't do as I say. (*Exit.*)

(*Clarence gives a low whistle, lights a cigarette, and goes to davenport and sits. He does not see the note. A second later, Sarah Maud steals on from left, not seeing Clarence, and tip-toes to davenport, reaches around to find the note, and is caught by Clarence in a firm grip.*)

Sarah M.—Oh, my soul!

Clarence—(*chuckling*) Caught you this time, by Jove. (*By the wrist he pulls Sarah M. around in front of him.*) So, it's you, is it?

Sarah M.—(*meek and discouraged*) Yes, it's me. But please let go my wrist.

Clarence—Not unless you promise not to run away. Do you?

Sarah M.—Oh, yes, I promise.

Clarence—(*releasing her*) Very well.

Sarah M.—(*pouting*) I don't think you're much of a gentleman.

Clarence—Don't you? That's too bad.

Sarah M.—(*walking around to the table*) No gentleman would act as you did just now.

Clarence—No lady would act as you did the other day.

Sarah M.—Oh, I don't know. (*She goes to piano and begins to play very loud.*)

Clarence—(*rising and going to piano*) I say, that's mean of you.

Sarah M.—I know I'm mean, but I'm honest.

Clarence—I say, what are you inferring now? Please, Sarah Maud, be nice.

Sarah M.—(*thumping*) I'm being as nice as I know how.

Clarence—(*shouting*) But, I want to talk to you. (*Each time he speaks she uses the loud pedal freely.*)

Sarah M.—But I'm a much better pianist than I am conversationalist.

Clarence—(*shouting*) I say, I didn't ask you to play for me.

Sarah M.—Didn't you?

(*He walks over to her and takes her hands from the keys.*)

Clarence—You've got to entertain me.

Sarah M.—(*rising and walking to other end of the room.*) I should think you were a sultan.

Clarence—(*grandly*) I am for tonight, and you are my favorite wife.

Sarah M.—Don't be foolish.

Clarence—(*hurt*) There; that's the way you talk.

Sarah M.—I can't help the way I talk. If I could, I'd improve it.

Clarence—You know I don't mean that.

Sarah M.—(*snapping*) How should I know what you mean?

Clarence—Sarah Maud, you're cruel.

Sarah M.—(*taking delight in her next remark*) I know it. I like to be. I like to hurt things. I always did. I used to pull the wings off flies, the legs off beetles, and—

Clarence—(*in amazement*) I say, I don't believe it.

Sarah M.—And the whiskers off the cat.

Clarence—(*cooing*) But you wouldn't be cruel to me. (*She gives him one, long, meaning glance*) I say, would you, now?

Sarah M.—(*sweetly and smiling*) I shouldn't mean to be, of course, but I couldn't promise anything.

Clarence—(*drawing nearer*) That's the way I like to have you talk.

Sarah M.—(*stiffening*) But it's not my real self. I'll tell you something if you won't tell.

Clarence—Never. Anything you tell me in confidence is sacred.

Sarah M.—There's nothing very sacred about this. In fact, it's profane.

Clarence—Profane.

Sarah M.—Um-um, my temper. I've got an awful one. (*Clarence backs off.*)

Clarence—But- but you never show it.

Sarah M.—(*threateningly*) Don't I?

Clarence—That is, I've never seen you.

Sarah M.—No, not yet, but you might at any time. It's like this. (*Smiling to herself*) It comes sometimes at the slightest provocation. One night at a barn dance in Freeport, a great gump tramped on my new white slippers, and I—I— (*shudders*)

Clarence—What did you do?

Sarah M.—(*closing her eyes*) I pulled out his hair, all of it, in great fistfuls.

Clarence—Oh, Sarah Maud!

Sarah M.—Another time, an old lady stepped on my dress—accidentally, of course—and I—

Clarence—You didn't?

Sarah M.—No, I didn't do anything to her.

Clarence—(*with a sigh of relief*) No!

Sarah M.—But I went straight home and chewed the knob off the mahogany bedpost.

Clarence—Is that how you lost your tooth?

Sarah M.—Lost my tooth?

Clarence—Um-um; you remember you said you had one false one.

Sarah M.—(*glibly*) Oh, yes, that's how I lost my tooth. Then, another time—

Clarence—Spare me.

Sarah M.—I don't see where I got such a temper from, but really there it is, and it's terribly unfortunate. It comes on without warning for the littlest things. I say without warning, but generally a few minutes before I have an insane desire to scream.

Clarence—Really! To scream!

Sarah M.—Um-um, to scream. (*She walks over to mantel above the fireplace and examines the picture of the three girls taken en groupe when children.*)

Clarence—What are you looking at?

Sarah M.—Come here! —(*He goes to her.*) That's us when we were youngsters. Aren't we dear? To look at me, there, you'd never suspect I had a temper would you?

Clarence—No, you look quite angelic, I'll say.

Sarah Maud—(*sweetly*) Now, Clarence, say you think I'm the sweetest—of the three of us, I mean.

Clarence—I'll say so. (*Turning and regarding her*) Then and now. Say, Sarah Maud (*attempts to embrace her*) I don't care if you have got a temper I love—

(*Sarah Maud screams. Pause while they stare at each other.*)

Clarence—(*falling back*) You screamed!

Sarah M.—(*calmly*) Um-um.

Clarence—But you said you had that desire when—

Sarah M.—(*clasping her head*) Oh, I know and I—feel it coming on. You'd better let me go, Clarence.

Clarence—(*helping her toward the door at right*) By all means, go, Sarah Maud, go.

Sarah M.—(from doorway) Before it is too late, Clarence, goodnight.

Clarence—Good night.

(*She goes off and he stands for a second watching her ascend the stairs.*)

Clarence—(turning back in the room) Damn shame! A mighty pretty girl. (*Enter Julia M. at left; sees Clarence and tries to escape.*)

Clarence—(running over to her) I say, Julia May—
Julia M.—(hopelessly) Yes, Clarence.

Clarence—Come in a minute.

Julia M.—(backing out) I—I—I—

Clarence—Don't make excuses. Come here. (*She enters timidly and he places his hands on her two shoulders.*) I'm going to ask you something.

Julia M.—Oh, Clarence, don't, please! I'm—I'm under oath tonight, not to answer truthfully to any question.

Clarence—(dropping his hands) By Jove, what next?

Julia M.—And, when you're under oath, you're under oath.

Clarence—What's this for?

Julia M.—I can't tell, that is, I can tell, but it wouldn't be the truth, so—

Clarence—You're up to some mischief and your Aunt Susan ought to know it.

Julia M.—Oh, no, Clarence, we aren't.

Clarence—(smiling diabolically) Which means you are, of course, after what you just told me.

Julia M.—Oh, yes, I mean we are.

Clarence—That's better. Stick to your contract. Julia May, I called you in here to ask you an important question.

Julia M.—But I—I can't answer it, truthfully.

Clarence—Which means, of course, you can answer it truthfully.

Julia M.—Oh, dear!

Clarence—Julia May, will you marry me?

Julia M.—(stopping to think a moment) Yes, Clarence!

Clarence—My darling! (He starts to embrace her.)

Julia M.—(drawing away) Which means no, Clarence, if I keep to the contract. (She smiles tantalizingly.)

Clarence—You are cruel.

Julia M.—I'm sorry.

Clarence—Which means you aren't.

Julia M.—I warned you, Clarence.

Clarence—But what right had you to warn me? What are you playing this way for? By Jove you are up to something. (Aside.) It will be the regret of mother's life that she trapped me here.

Julia M.—What are you saying?

Clarence—(sulkily) Nothing. (Suddenly.) Will you do something for me?

Julia M.—What?

Clarence—Tell my mother to come here at once.

Julia M.—(with a twinkle) Oh, yes, Clarence, I will. (She goes to door at left; nods back at him tantalizingly) Which means, of course, that I won't if I keep to my contract.

Clarence—(Starts to run after her, but it is too late.) Damn! (He paces back and forth down stage.)

(Enter Mary A., hatted and coated and carrying a suit case. She does not notice him at first, and steals on from right.)

Clarence—Mary Ann!

Mary Ann—(startled, attempts to escape after dropping her suitcase. She makes a bold dash for the French door.) Oh!

Clarence—(catching her) No, you don't. This is no hour to take a stroll in the garden. It's ten o'clock. (His manner becomes masterful. He is desperately determined.)

Mary A.—I must.

Clarence—Very well; then so must I. We'll go together.

Mary A.—Oh, no!

Clarence—Very well. We won't cross this threshold, either of us. Come here. (He grabs her by the wrist, and pulls her down stage.) Mary Ann, you've got to listen to me.

Mary A.—Oh, Clarence! What has happened to you? You—you are a regular cave man.

Clarence—(between his teeth) It's the cave man stuff that gets 'em, they tell me.

Mary A.—Oh!

Clarence—I've stood enough nonsense.

Mary A.—Oh, dear! I never saw you like this. You are dreadful! I—I think I'm going to scream.

Clarence—Scream, then!

Mary A.—(flops into chair by table.) You're cruel. What right have you to hold me here, a—a p-p-prisoner?

Clarence—(towering over her) The right of might! Stop crying!

Mary A.—I—I c-can't.

Clarence—Mary Ann, obey me. (She wipes her eyes and makes an effort.) I have an important question to ask you.

Mary A.—But, I—

Clarence—(In a terrible voice.) Mary Ann!

Mary A.—(meekly) Yes, Clarence.

Clarence—Listen! (Julia M. and Sarah M. appear at the French door, unnoticed by either Clarence or Mary A.) I've been here at Fleurmont three weeks. I've seen you girls every day, three and four times a day, and I've

made an effort to see you oftener, and you know when a man does that—

Mary A.—*(rising)* Oh, Clarence don't say any more, please don't.

(Sarah M. opens French door a crack to hear better)

Clarence—Sit down. *(She sits.)* Mary Ann, love is a strange thing.

Mary A.—I know it. I kn-know it. No one kn-knows it any better than I do.

Clarence—Stop sniffing! *(She wipes her eyes again.)* And a wonderful thing. Mary Ann, I love you.

Mary A.—*(rising again)* Oh, you aren't going to propose.

Clarence—That's just what I am going to do, and you're going to listen.

Mary A.—I—c-c-can't!

Clarence—And, what's more, you're going to marry me.

Mary A.—*(falling on her knees)* Please, Clarence, let me go.

Clarence—Get up! *(She obeys.)* And you're going to say you will marry me before you leave this room.

(Mary A. gives a moan of distress. Sarah M., realizing now is the time, bursts open the door, rushes in, grabs Mary A. by the hand and drags her out while Julia M., the accomplice, takes the suit case and switches off the lights. It is all done so quickly that Clarence stares stupified. Darkness, except for the end of his cigarette. The French door slams to, then silence. Presently Mrs. M.'s voice is heard off stage at right.)

Mrs. M.—Clarence! It's ten o'clock. *(She stumbles on at right.)*

Clarence—Yes, mother.

Mrs. M.—*(in a sweet tone, thinking of course they are spooning)* Oh, I am intruding.

Clarence—*(switching on lights)* It's time somebody did.

Mrs. M.—(*looking about*) Where is she?

Clarence—She?

Mrs. M.—I—I thought you were enjoying each other's company in the dark.

Clarence—(*elated*) By Jove, I almost got her.

Mrs. M.—Almost got her?

Clarence—(*unheeding his mother*) I've got it. I've got it.

Mrs. M.—(*shaking him*) It! What are you talking about?

Clarence—The idea. It, the idea! By Jove, the next girl that I propose to will marry me, I'll wager. (*Turns to his mother.*) Behold the new Clarence, Clarence, the Cave Man!

Mrs. M.—Have you gone mad? Where is she?

Clarence—(*still possessed of his one idea*) Who?

Mrs. M.—Sarah Maud.

Clarence—(*vaguely*) Sarah Maud—but—but it wasn't Sarah Maud. It was Mary Ann, and I almost won her, when some bally fool broke the spell.

(*Enter Mrs. D., from left, much excited.*)

Mrs. D.—(*rushing between mother and son*) They have gone. They have gone.

Mrs. M.—Who? Oh, what is it?

Mrs. D.—My nieces have gone—eloped with those gardeners.

Clarence—(*flopping in a chair*) My god!

Mrs. M.—(*shrieking*) What! Not with those gardeners, those dreadful gardeners! Oh, I'm going to faint!

Mrs. D.—No, you aren't. (*Not knowing what she is saying.*) No, you aren't. And I took them from home to make brilliant matches for them—to save them from this.

Mrs. M.—Their tastes were low. Their tastes were low. Their tastes—

Clarence—were low.

Mrs. D.—What will their father say? Why did I send for them?

Mrs. M.—Get her smelling salts, Clarence. (*Clarence gets up.*)

Mrs. D.—No, no, I don't want my smelling salts; I want my nieces.

(*French door opens and Sarah M., followed by Julia M., and Mary A., and all three gardeners enter.*)

Sarah M.—(*running to Mrs. D.*) Aunt Susan, we've come back. (*They cluster about her and the gardeners keep in the background.*)

Julia M.—And we've brought our bridegrooms.

Clarence—Jehosaphat!

Mary A.—And they want to be introduced.

Mrs. D.—Oh, girls, what have you done?

Sarah M.—There, we've made a mess of it. I knew we would, Aunt Susan. (*She clutches her head and looks straight into her eyes.*) Listen! Your wildest ambitions are satisfied. Do you hear? (*She pulls forward Third.*) Let me present John Anthony Price 2nd, and grandson of the John Anthony Price, heir to millions; but I love him just the same.

Clarence—Jehosaphat!

Mrs. D.—John Anthony Price! Is it true?

Third—(*coming forward and offering a hand*) It is, madam, and I'm delighted the fact pleases you, because it pleases me mightily.

Sarah M.—I'm going to have everything I want—clothes, jewels and you're to visit me; but wait (*stepping back.*) It's your turn, Mary Ann.

Mary A.—Dear Aunt Susan, I know you'll be pleased to meet Paul Levally, son of the famous painter, and a painter, himself.

Mrs. D.—My dear boy, No. Why, I knew your father in Paris.

First—(laughing and shaking hands) I've long wanted to shake your hand in gratitude. You furnished me with a job and then a wife, and what more can a man ask?

Mrs. D.—Oh, my children, my children, whom have I been employing unawares?

Third—We've had a jolly lark out of it.

Mary A.—There's Julia May! Come dear.

(Julia M., followed by second, comes forward.)

Julia M.—*(shyly)* And this, Aunt Susan, is Lee Pratt—

Mrs. D.—*(staggering)* Not Lee Pratt, the writer! Not Lee Pratt, himself!

Second—And a most grateful one, madam, for the practical knowledge your garden has given me. You see, I was writing a book in which gardens played a big part, and so I had to have practical knowledge.

Mrs. D.—I—I am overcome.

Sarah M.—And, now, Auntie, I ask you—Could we have done any better?

Mrs. D.—Was ever a woman so deceived?

Mrs. M.—Yes, I was!

Sarah M.—Come forth, Clarence, and congratulate us. *(The girls gather around Clarence and talk to him.)*

Second—I've apologies to make for the way we deserted you. *(To Mrs. D.)*

Mrs. D.—I—I thought you had stolen the silver!

Third—Now, Mrs. Davenport, we never stole a thing in our lives.

Mrs. D.—*(her arms encircling her nieces)* Oh, yes, you have. You've stolen my most precious jewels!

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